

Generally, a search team should consist of three men—one to search bags, one to do body pat-down searches, and one to provide security. If there are two teams, at least six men are needed, plus one NCO to oversee the operation.

Additionally, a "hot box" is needed where any contraband within the perimeter can be placed. Anything the soldiers of the process team find that may be contraband, that has any intelligence value, or that may be dangerous is brought here, evaluated, or disposed of as appropriate. If the NCO believes it is important enough, he may bring it to the attention of the process team platoon leader. Meanwhile, it saves time for every soldier to know that if he finds something questionable or that he thinks may be dangerous, he takes it straight to the hot box and then gets back to his station. The hot box should be at least 35 meters from the process line, perpendicular to the search station, or, if possible, around the corner of a building or below ground. This site

should be manned by one of the EOD personnel (if there are any) or at least by an NCO.

The last two sites are the medical screening and debriefing stations. At the medical screening site, the attached medic or doctor checks each person quickly on the way through, concentrating mainly on symptoms of some form of communicable illness that could be a hazard. He may also give first aid at the site if time and circumstances permit.

Finally, the evacuee arrives at the debriefing site where the officer in charge (OIC) or an attached intelligence NCO may check for any potentially helpful intelligence he may have. It is highly recommended, however, that this station *not* be run by the OIC but rather by the attached intelligence NCO or officer. The OIC of the process team will have more than enough on his hands and should not be tied to this one station.

That, in a nutshell, is how a process-

ing station can be run during a NEO. Of course, any necessary shortcuts can be taken when there is not enough time for the entire process.

The evacuation of noncombatants from a potential or actual combat zone is a mission which must often be executed on short notice. A commander who recognizes this as a contingency mission and trains and organizes for it will most likely be able to complete this critical mission quickly and without inordinate casualties to either the noncombatants or his force. The keys to a successful noncombatant evacuation operation are detailed training and coordination to ensure that every member of the team knows his job and does it right the first time.

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Operation DESERT STORM

Crossing the LD

CAPTAIN THOMAS E. BERON

Leaders preparing for combat must try to anticipate all the things that can possibly go wrong. Then they should make plans for dealing with these contingencies when they occur. Such plans can prevent disaster, as my company learned during Operation DESERT STORM.

For six months, our battalion training had focused on engaging and defeating the Iraqi Army. Our mission for the upcoming operation was relatively simple. We would conduct a flanking movement to strike deep into the enemy's rear area, cutting lines of communication and then establishing block-

ing positions to prevent his retreat. My job, as antiarmor company (Company E) commander, would be to provide long-range TOW fires wherever the battalion commander needed them.

Leaving the task force tactical operations center after the final line-of-departure briefing, I felt relieved. I would return to my company and pass on the order to begin the attack, and in two hours we would be in enemy territory. Soon the apprehension and doubt would give way to action and challenge.

My soldiers, sections, and platoons were well trained and ready for combat. The six months in country before the war

had allowed us to prepare tactically, physically, and emotionally. The command and control glitches had been worked out. Equipment shortcomings had been identified and corrected. The nervousness and fear of the unknown had been addressed, discussed, explained, and finally accepted. Our confessions had been heard, our sleeves were rolled up, and we were ready to fight.

Mission analysis indicated that the first phase of the operation, the drive to the Euphrates River valley, would hold little opportunity for my company. A mechanized infantry antiarmor company is basically a defensive unit, one that

is not made for firing rapidly on the move. It was the operation's final phase that was tailor-made for the TOW II missile.

The Euphrates River valley was large, flat, and open, with long-range visibility possible. Through this valley would pass the Iraqi armor, either coming or going, reinforcing or retreating. To us, it would make no difference which direction the tanks were traveling; we would find them, create an engagement area, and turn it into a kill zone. In the valley, the only thing that would matter would be how many TOWs were shooting. The problem was that what lay between us and the Euphrates kill zones was 284 kilometers of rocky desert. It wouldn't matter how well trained we were, how tactically proficient we were, or how much courage we had if we didn't get our ITVs (improved TOW vehicles) to the valley in force.

In preparing to accomplish this task, we focused on three areas: We would make sure the soldiers understood the problem and were ready to give their best effort to maintenance; we would streamline the company maintenance team's standing operating procedure (SOP) so they could repair any breakdowns quickly; and we would develop a plan for using the equipment and personnel from any track that did break down during the movement.

Convincing the soldiers of the importance of operator-level maintenance was relatively easy. They *wanted* to go fight and understood that a breakdown might keep them out of the battle. At the same time, all of them knew the road home went through Iraq, and all of them wanted to get home.

For the skeptical and timid, I made sure to point out that there was no telling how long it would take the battalion maintenance team to locate and repair one of our disabled vehicles. Meanwhile, the task force would move on, leaving the vehicle crew to wait alone in the Iraqi desert.

This logic seemed convincing, but streamlining the company maintenance team SOP was slightly more challenging. Since our PLL (prescribed load

list) truck was in the combat trains, we had to carry some repair parts with us for quick fixes. We used historical data to determine which parts were most likely to break on this kind of mission and established a mini-PLL on the maintenance track that moved with the company.

Next we established a time-of-repair cutoff to decide which tracks the company mechanics would try to repair and which they would leave for battalion to collect. We decided that 30 minutes was the most we could allow for repair. Anything that would take more than that would be left for battalion. We drilled the mechanics to perform like a race-car pit crew on a disabled vehicle to determine the problem, the solution, and how long the repair would take. Each member had an area of expertise that he would troubleshoot first.

With this preparation complete, the executive officer and the first sergeant were left to supervise the maintenance team during the operation and to make decisions on repairs.

The most complex element of the plan was how to use the equipment and personnel that we took from disabled tracks. My platoon leaders and I all designated the tracks we would jump to if our own broke down. Other key leaders would be bumped according to space, losses, and needs at that particular time. The XO, who would act as a roving troubleshooter in his HMMWV, would supervise all crossloading.

Since an ITV has racks for only ten missiles, we decided to crossload TOW rounds only if empty racks were available. And since TOW equipment is historically temperamental, we planned to take as much M220 equipment as possible off any track that was deadlined. We established a priority list of items to take and saw that each track had a copy of the list on its fuel cell. The XO would decide what equipment we would distribute, load it onto his HMMWV, and ferry the various components around to the remaining tracks. The SOP, once it was in place and well rehearsed, seemed sound.

The LD plan began to unfold nicely. All the companies found their particular

crossing points and started moving through the Iraqis' berm at the Saudi-Iraqi border. Once the lead elements of Company E began moving over the top, I completed the last-minute checks on my own track. The maps were up and the follow-on map sheets were laid out in order, ready to replace those no longer needed. Unbroken chemlights were in place for use in marking my ITV as a coalition vehicle at night. Extra grease pencils and alcohol pens were stored, and smoke and pyrotechnic devices were positioned according to load plan. The Loran was wired into position with 89 way points plotted, and the external antenna was erected. I had everything I would need, and an SOP to locate it. Then disaster struck.

I knew something was wrong, even before the driver's voice crackled over the intercom. The lurch and then the lack of forward momentum were warning enough. "Sir, I think the transmission's gone." I couldn't believe it. My own track was deadlined 100 yards short of the LD!

Cursing the unfairness of it all, we went into action. The call went out that my track had a problem. The mechanics came forward to troubleshoot, and my attached rifle platoon leader came to pick me up. (How naked I felt when I jumped across to his track with only my weapon and my map.)

As we pulled away, though, I looked back to see the mechanics swarming around the dead track like ants. Twenty minutes later, I heard the good news that my track was fixed and coming to catch up with me. The mechanics had replaced a U-joint and had secured an uncooperative hose with a black web belt. That's what I call a pit crew!

Anticipation, planning, and rehearsal had prevented a disaster before it started. Company E reached the Euphrates River Valley with all of its tracks.

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